


North LSD Survey Says: People Want More Buses, Fewer Cars

 chi.streetsblog.org/2017/12/07/north-lake-shore-drive-survey-says-people-want-more-buses-fewer-cars/

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A significant part of any public project is collecting quantifiable and useable feedback from residents. Displaying that information to the public helps maintain transparency for the project. In the case of the ongoing discussion about how we should rebuild North Lake Shore Drive, IDOT has finally released this information that was initially teased back at the previous private meeting. A little over 2,400 people took the survey.

The survey started off with some standard questions about transportation modes and the corridor. The first question asked how many vehicles people own. 41% of respondents stated they do not own a car at all while 67% said they have a bicycle or use Divvy.

There was also decent support for the proposed new Addison vehicle access lanes but a more lukewarm response to the idea of removing ramps at Wilson Ave, and an arguably hostile response toward turning Bryn Mawr into an at-grade junction. There was similar disagreement toward reducing vehicle lanes from four to three north of Montrose Ave.

Responses to other questions provided insight as to whether people would like to see the car-centric status quo remain on LSD, or shift to a more transit-oriented approach. The most fascinating response was to a question about how often people drive on NLSD, with clear majority driving fewer than three days a week and 41 percent of respondents said they do not get in a vehicle most weeks. In a later question, another 680 people said they could use existing bus routes but don't.

The reasons for this are instantly made clear in other answers in the results. These boil down to buses that are too slow and unreliable in comparison to all other modes of transportation. This was again confirmed, with 508 people flat out stating they would be more willing to take the bus if it "was consistent and not affected by traffic." Roughly the same results were present when bus riders were asked if there was a way to get them to take transit more often.

My reaction to the survey results was nearly identical to that of fellow Streetsblog freelancer Michael Podgers in a post on Twitter:

@n_lakeshoredr: Its interesting to see your survey results; most people want to see improved transit/bus services & access to the lakefront trail, but current proposals call for more traffic lanes for cars? Hmmmmm.... somethings up; maybe design the road for people and NOT cars.

— Urbanelijk (@Urbanelijk) December 1, 2017

It's obvious that a majority of people who took the survey want to ride the bus due to the negative effects drivers have on congestion and pollution. The solution is clear: build bus lanes. But IDOT doesn't seem to have gotten the memo yet.

Accompanying these survey results were direct answers from IDOT on several pressing questions that fell short of honestly addressing the project's problems. The department itself admits in a response that the project is unable to solve congestion but instead seeks to improve traffic flow by removing bottlenecks. IDOT even mentions that "The project is looking to balance transit needs with the safety and operational improvement needs of NLSD and the need to minimize impacts to Lincoln Park."

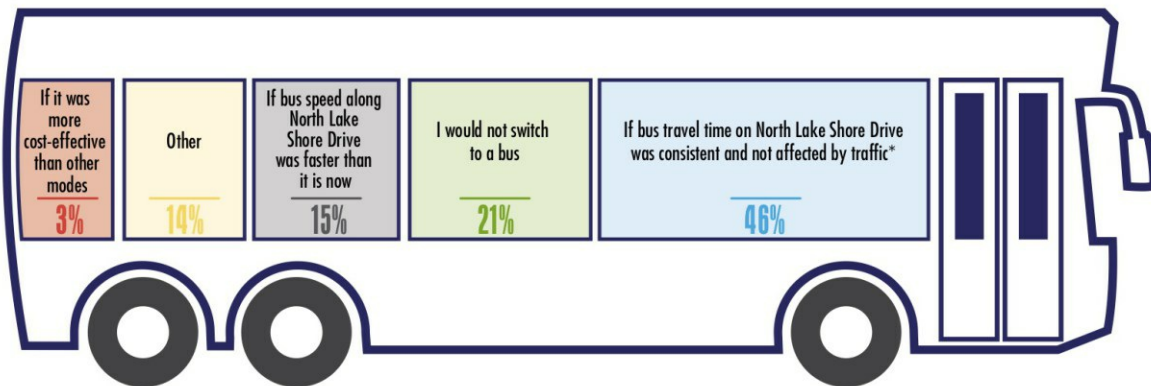
The constant struggle to balance the needs of transit riders, drivers, pedestrian, cyclists, and other park users is reaching a breaking point. Without significantly expanding the shoreline into Lake Michigan there just is not enough room to please everyone at the same time to the degree IDOT wants to.

In some ways, I understand the department's predicament. At the end of day cars still dominate and the department is geared toward supporting and continuing that domination. Even when IDOT considers usage numbers from more progressive organizations like the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the department is still locked in the mindset that the car-oriented status quo must be maintained.

What Would Make Riding the Bus on North Lake Shore Drive a Better Option?

Motor Vehicle Users Provide Input

North Lake Shore Drive
Survey Results



**For self-selected bus riders, this response increases to 61%.*

Q21 Which of these factors would help make riding the bus along North Lake Shore Drive a better option for you?
1,094 Answered

Almost half of respondents said making bus service reliable and immune to traffic jams, i.e. adding dedicated lanes, would make transit a better option on LSD. Image: IDOT

However, that does not stop IDOT from taking bolder steps even if they do not end up where urbanists want them to. Merely considering what congestion would look like if a lane in either direction was taken away from cars and given to buses would be a step in the right direction. The department does not have to commit to the idea, but just the act of putting it out there as an official proposal would be an essential step forward. It would give all of us who support the expansion of transit, bicycling, and pedestrian infrastructure an official rallying point that we could point to and say, “We understand this looks like an inconvenience for drivers, but let us explain why it would be a net gain for all residents.”

It’s hard to shake the feeling that, as far as IDOT is concerned, if push came to shove, bus lanes would be the first thing knocked off the drawing board. Whether it is bus lanes replaced with managed lanes (shared with drivers who pay a toll or are carpooling) and those managed lanes removed for political reasons, it’s difficult not to feel like one of these three pillars is in danger of being knocked down. Granted, it’s possible that none of this will end up happening, and I hope IDOT ultimately proves me wrong.

[The full survey results are here](#) and [comment responses are here](#), and while you are on the site, [please leave some feedback for IDOT](#).